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SUNDAY OPENING OF LIBRARIES

BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER

1872

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

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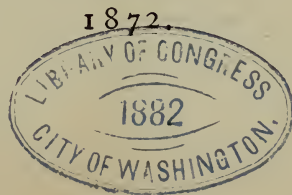
# SHOULD THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES BE OPENED ON SUNDAY?

AN ADDRESS  
BY  
HENRY WARD BEECHER,

DELIVERED AT THE REQUEST OF MEMBERS OF THE MERCANTILE LIBRARY  
ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK CITY, IN THE COOPER UNION HALL,  
MONDAY EVENING, APRIL 22D, 1872. PHONOGRAPHICALLY  
REPORTED BY T. J. ELLINWOOD.



NEW YORK:  
J. B. FORD & COMPANY,



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## CORRESPONDENCE.

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NEW YORK, April, 1872.

REV. HENRY WARD BEECHER:

*Dear Sir:* The question of the advisability of opening the reading-rooms of the great public libraries on Sunday is being earnestly discussed among their members. We, who are members of the Mercantile Library, feel solicitous that this matter should be decided so as to advance the best moral, intellectual, and social interests of ourselves, our associates, and all the young men of New York, and therefore we respectfully request that for our guidance you will, if convenient and agreeable to yourself, give public expression to your views upon this important question on some day to be named by you.

Respectfully,

HENRY D. LLOYD,	PETER VOORHIS,
GEORGE C. LEE,	WM. G. DAVIES,
DANIEL F. APPLETON,	WM. L. FELT,
JOHN C. LLOYD,	WM. O. McDOWELL

and several hundred others.

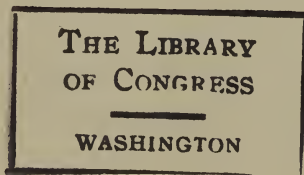
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BROOKLYN, April, 1872.

HENRY D. LLOYD AND OTHERS:

*Gentlemen:* I have received from the Trustees of the Cooper Institute, at your request, an invitation to address them upon the propriety of opening the public reading-rooms of large cities upon Sunday, under suitable regulations. It will give me great pleasure to comply with your wishes, and unless some other date shall be more suitable, I will take the liberty of mentioning Monday night, April 22. I am, very truly, yours,

HENRY WARD BEECHER.





# AN ADDRESS

BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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## Should the Public Libraries be Opened on Sunday?

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It has been said that whenever the clergy shall have arrived at anything like a unanimous opinion upon the subject of the observance of the Lord's Day, we shall find the laity agreeing. I have no doubt of it, and believe also that the converse is true; that whenever the intelligent laity agree upon the subject of the Sabbath day, they will find the clergy agreeing with them. For, happily, in our day there is little distinction between the clergy and the laity. The word *citizen* swallows up all distinctions. We dwell together in one commonwealth, having common interests. There is such familiar intercourse, there is such necessity of mutual consideration and consultation, that in regard to all great moral public questions no lines ought to be drawn between the opinions of the clergy and those of the laity.

I count it a most auspicious circumstance when an audience is gathered together, not on the spur of some campaign excitement, but when sober men and sober women assemble to discuss a great moral topic that can have no more interest to them than such as springs from its relation to the commonwealth. I should be sorry to suppose that this was a partisan meeting. I should be sorry to be supposed myself to be antagonistic to those who are desirous of maintaining the sanctity of the Lord's Day. I am the child of a Puritan ancestry. My own earliest associations are with the strictest observance of the Lord's Day. I love that day. I love its usages. I desire to see it maintained. More than that, I would have it lengthen its cords and strengthen its stakes. And where it has done one thing well, I would have it do twenty more things well. It is because I believe that this day of rest is capable of a larger use—not by making it less moral, not by treating it in a

spirit of desecration, not by dragging it down, but by giving it a fuller and broader application—that I am here to-night. It is because I believe it can be made better than it has been, and more heartily maintained and more sincerely respected and loved.

I know there are many who hold that this is a day which is prescribed by direct divine authority, that it is obligatory in the sense of an express command, and that the mode of observation is substantially settled. Men whose opinions I respect hold these views much more rigidly than I do myself. But I find over against them a very large number of people, many of whom were not born in this land, and who have brought the customs and usages of other lands to our shores. There are among us many men of various degrees of intelligence who believe that Sunday is more a holiday, in the higher sense of that term, than anything else, and that it ought to be a day full of mere social enjoyment. I respect their liberty of opinion, although I do not entertain their sentiments, either. I stand between these two extremes, attempting, if possible, to find a ground on which both classes may stand, so there may not be any obstacle in the way of coöperation on the part of all intelligent and good citizens.

This is a day peculiarly American. Not that it has not been observed in all countries, but that perhaps nowhere else, from the very founding of the colonies, has there been an institution which has been like the New England and the American *Sunday*—the day of rest—the one religious day. In other lands it has been partly religious, or it has been a day of games and exhibitions and sports, with a little preliminary ruffle of church, and all the rest of the garment of anything; but it was in America that the Lord's Day dawned, as it were, with the light of the other world shining over its brow. It has stretched out its hands in our thought, and in our associations, and spread multitudinous blessings over all the continent. I used to think that nothing was on Sunday as it was on other days. Surely, to my eye, the sun rose with more majesty and the birds sang with more sweetness on that day than on any other. To my remembrance, the silence of Sunday was like no other silence. Although I confess that as a boy, I did not keep the Lord's Day according to the catechetical instruction which I received; although I acknowledge that I indulged in many a sinful giggle, and found humor in many things which were not allowed in church, or elsewhere, still I bear witness that a certain moral sensibility, and a certain poetic element, was derived by me from the strict and Puritan observance of the Sabbath, which I can never enough be thankful for.



I honor the memory of the men who kept the old Sunday ; and if I thought that the steps which we make in advance would take away from the idea that on that day the Lord is especially near to men (in their thought, though not in fact) ; if I thought that they would subtract one particle of its stimulation of the best and noblest elements of man's nature, I would never utter a word, nor by any means give my influence toward the abatement of the rigor of the Sabbath observances. I stand here loving the day, and honoring it ; I honor it for what it has done for me, for my fathers, and for the community. And I say, not that there must be less Sunday, but that there must be more Sunday ; not that there must be less sanctity, but that sanctity, taking to itself humanity, must be broader and deeper ; not that the church should be robbed, but that the church should know better how large is the patrimony which God has given to it in this day.

I do not think that we have received our Lord's Day on the ground of absolute command. Certainly the Jewish Sabbath is not ours. We cannot, therefore, divine from that Sabbath how this day ought to be kept. The old Jews kept their Sabbath as simply a day of rest and recreation. They were not forbidden to have social entertainment on that day. Indeed, it was the one joyful, cheerful day of the week. The only thing that was barred was *work*. Abstinence from work was carried to a ridiculous extent. It was forbidden, for instance, that a man should walk with heavy nails in his shoes, lest walking on the grass he should shell out some of its seeds, and so do that which was equivalent to thrashing grain on Sunday. It was not allowable for a man to lead an ass to water with a long halter, because, while the horse bore a part of the weight of that halter, the man would bear the other part, and so would be carrying burdens on Sunday and would be working ! But to entertain one's friends on Sunday ; to rejoice with them ; to cheer their hearts with entertainments prepared beforehand—that was especially allowable. Sunday was not distinctively a religious day. It was simply a day of secular rest. But that day has passed away for the most part, so that it gives us no idea of the method in which we should observe our holy day.

So far as the Christian Sunday, or the Lord's Day, is concerned, we have no command in the New Testament as to the mode in which it is to be observed. We have scarcely more than the recognition that it was observed, in addition to the old Jewish Sabbath. We have neither from the primitive church nor from the Scriptures any hint, explicit and binding, as to the mode of observing it. This we know : that among the early Christians it was a day of joyfulness.

It was a day of triumph. It was a day in which they kindled the fervor of enjoyment more highly than on any other day of the week. Our Lord's Day has come to us strained through the usages of the mediæval age and church; but largely we have received it from the hands of our Puritan ancestors. Seeing the frivolity, the secular wastefulness which occurred on that day, they were by stress of circumstances, I think, driven to the opposite extreme; and they made the day so exclusively a day of moral teaching and self-restraint that it comes down to us with bars and bolts which did not belong to the primitive Lord's Day, and which reason does not justify.

#### THE FOUNDATION PRINCIPLE.

Now, we are to determine what is best in regard to the observance of Sunday by some principle; and I know of no other principle which is so good as this: *It is the Lord's Day.*

Who is the Lord? He is that Jesus who healed on the Sabbath day, when the Jews thought it was professional work, and rebuked him for it. He is that Jesus who justified those disciples that were gathering wheat, and rubbing it in their hands, and eating it, being called to account for it by the Jews, as though rubbing were grinding, and therefore breaking Sunday! He is that Jesus who, when found fault with for healing a man on the Sabbath day, declared that it was *lawful to do good on the Sabbath day.* In the face and teeth of the Jews, he declared that the Sabbath was a day of humanity.

On another occasion he declared of the Sabbath: "It was made for man, not man for it." It is man's servant, not his master. Wherever the Sabbath day, therefore, is so administered that any part of the community are oppressed by it, they have a right to rise up and break through that observance: because the day was not made to keep down manhood; it was made to lift it up. It was not made to take away liberty; it was made to increase it. It was not made to circumscribe man's thoughts and feeling and conduct; it was made to augment them. In short, the Lord's Day is a day for larger manhood.

In looking at it, then, in this way, we must inquire what are the beneficial uses that can be made of it.

#### PHYSICAL REST.

First, we may adopt, very well, I think, to a certain extent, the primary functions of the Jewish Sabbath; in other words, we may make it a day of bodily rest. We all need rest. We all need to have at least one day in the seven in which the mill does not grind, and in which the great maelstrom of society finds rest itself, and lets

us rest. The merchant with his staggering brain, the busy plodder, the laborer,—all need rest. All American society is keyed so high, is stimulated to such a degree, that nowhere else is one day of full and complete physical rest more necessary than here. And in this regard the only people who are professionally without any rest are ministers of the Gospel. I need rest on Sunday, and do not get it. By the absence of it, I appreciate the desirableness of it.

Friends, when it is said that we are to rest on the Sabbath day, it does not come home to many of you as it does to others. Most of those who are gathered here are too prosperous to know what is the sweetness and balm of the rest the Sabbath gives. How many poor men there are who rise before the sun rises, and who work through all the hours of the day, and through every day of the week, until late at night, and fall upon their couches conscious that they have taxed every bone and every muscle to its utmost; and who, at last, when the six days have rolled around, and they wake prematurely on the Sabbath with inexpressible gladness, turn and say, "Thank God! I have one day on which to rest!"

If there were here a servile class as there has been in every nation for ages, this day of enforced rest, although it were enforced by a secular and physical law, would be a mercy. Where a day of rest has been enforced, it has been a supreme bounty to the working man.

Moreover, how many men are there so separated from their households during the week that they can scarcely say that they know their own families! They see them little. Many men go to their business early and return late, and do not see their children. They go away before the children are up, and come back after their children have gone to bed. How many men there are who need a day in which to make the acquaintance of their own households, in order that they may be known, and felt, and welcomed, and loved! How many men there are in the community who are goaded and taxed by anxious thought, by incessant attritions, and who long for one day in which they can unbuckle the harness and rest! The Lord's Day is a bounty of God which they who are prosperous, and who are never taxed with care, and to whom God seems to have given a perpetual vacation, cannot understand; and it is not for them to determine what are the benefits of this day of rest. If you were to obliterate the Lord's Day, it would double the burdens of the poor. It would make the yoke sorer, and it would make the back ache more severely than ever. Therefore, for the sake of the poor toiling man, I say, Blessed be the one-seventh part of the time which God has hallowed, and which we are to consecrate to the needs of the laboring classes!

## MORAL EDUCATION.

Not only is there to be bodily rest, but, as the center of all manhood, there must be a consideration of the moral element. The Lord's Day ought to be improved for *moral culture*, so far as possible. I believe that worship in the house of God is a wise thing on the Sabbath for all good citizens. I would not enforce it by law; I would not enforce it even by a coercive and punitive public sentiment; but I would, if I could, persuade all my fellow-citizens, once in the day, at least, to go—father and mother, and brothers and sisters—to church. A sweeter group, a pleasanter scene, no painter ever beheld, than a whole household cleanly dressed and with smiling faces, the large feet moving with heavier tread, and the little feet pattering on behind, going to the house of God, to unite in common hymns, and common supplications, and common worship, and listen together to instruction concerning the daily duties of life.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a very hard time, six days in the week wrestling with the devil. He does cudgel us, and tempt us to selfishness, and make us envious, and jealous, and hard, and avaricious, as we toil and are taxed during the week. We do not mean to unman ourselves on Monday; but we fall into the current, and are swept into ways which in our better moments we would not choose, and which our judgment does not approve; we live below our ideal; and it is a good thing for us on one day of the week to go where we shall have our ideal raised again, and our memory of better things quickened. It is a good thing for us to have a day on which we can take breath, and get a new start for the next week.

Do you tell me that the working people cannot go to church after having toiled all the week? Going to church once on Sunday will rest them. For the matter of that, I am witness to many and many a man who has found the sweetest and soundest rest in church! But even if they maintain their wakefulness (as, if the service and sermon are not too long, they will), there is that in the economy of religious service which every man needs. And those men need it most who have the least of it. I mean those men who are at the lowest ebb in society; the lowest classes of men, of whom I think, for whom I sympathize, to whom I give my life's best endeavors—my brethren who are at the bottom. In behalf of them, more than of any others, I plead for the Sabbath services of the church; because you can do for men nothing so good as to make them competent to do for themselves. I say that essential manhood begins in moral sentiment, and that the poor who have true moral principle in them can organize more speedily around themselves the deficient elements, and lift themselves up into light and privilege. A poor man



who is without a moral sentiment in him is poor indeed. It is a good thing to give a man a barrel of flour rather than that his household should lack bread; but there is far a better gift to a man than that, even; it is the power to earn that barrel of flour. It is a good thing to give men refreshment, and amusement, if need be, on the Sabbath day; but it is better to give them a manhood out of which will come satisfaction, and rest, and refinement, and education, and aspiration. I plead for the Sabbath service of the church as one of the elements of education needed by all, but more especially by those who are poor, uncomely, unshorn, unwashed, uneducated. The lower down you go, the more men you find who need the influences that fall upon the top. As in the forest it is the tops of the trees that cheat the parts below of sunlight, so in society the bottom is cheated by the top. The top takes all privilege, and the bottom has little or none.

#### THE SOCIAL ELEMENT.

More than this, while the Lord's Day should be a day of rest and of moral culture, for the sake of manhood, I hold that it is a day on which religion should be helped by the *social element*. I do not believe in solitariness in religion. I do not believe that any thought or feeling is better for having grown alone. A plant that has grown in the dark lacks color and fiber. A potato vine that has grown in a cellar toward a little crack through which comes a beam of light—how spindling and worthless it is! A religious culture which is cloistered and closeted is full of sentiment and sap; but it is crude sap and useless sentiment.

When the Lord made a man, he made him to grow altogether. You cannot send up his religious feelings like a steeple, while all his other feelings remain uncultivated. His intellect must grow in connection with his social affections, and his social affections must grow in connection with his moral sentiments, if you would give him true religious culture.

The Lord's Day is a good day in which to learn to love your neighbor as yourself. I do not think it is a great sin if your neighbor has his side door open on the Sabbath day for you to walk across the lawn and sit on his porch, and talk with him of things seemly. I think the Lord likes that. I do not think that if your household is made radiant, and your children wake up and say (as I never did) "Thank God, it is Sunday!" I don't think that if you make it the best day of the week, and your children are good-natured and joyful, that they are any the worse. Let the church service inspire conscience and moral sentiment, and let the household inspire social affections, love, and fellowship one with another. Let a part of the observance

of the Lord's Day be that which makes men, forget their differences, forget that they are rivals, forget each other's faults, and look upon one another as fellow-travelers toward the great future. Let men learn on the Lord's Day to worship God in the church, but also to love their fellows in the household. To love men—is that a desecration of Sunday? I believe in letting out the harness a little. I believe in making the holes for the buckle a little lower down. Let our Lord's Day be a church day in the morning, and a family day the rest of the time. I think that we preach too much. I think that we overteach and overtax in the Sabbath school. I think we are making the Lord's Day laborious. I do not think that we use Sunday enough to make the family finer, sweeter, more compact, more homogeneous, more social, and so more religious. I see many men who come to church stern and stiff. They would not for all the world ride in a car on Sunday—no; nor go over the ferry on Sunday—no; nor do anything at home that made them agreeable—no! I do not hold up their way of keeping the Sabbath as a model. Sunday is a day of household love. It is a day of family reunion. It is a day in which the children ought to feel that their father and mother never were so handsome before, and never were so good. It is a day in which every part of the household should, at the going down of the sun, be able to say, "Thank God for this open door of heaven, which has poured out so many happy hours on us."

It is bad to bring up children with such a sense of the sanctity of Sunday that they shall feel not gently restrained, and sweetly and pleasantly impressed, but that the day is a terror, a yoke, an iron rod. It is God's day, and is a bounty, and children ought to know it. It is a day of liberty to men, and children ought to be made to feel it. Any administration of the Lord's Day in the family, which makes men tire of it, is bad. Any way of keeping Sunday so that the household is not made happier and better by it, is an unchristian way of keeping it. It was made for man; man was not made for it.

#### SUNDAY TO BE MADE BOUNTIFUL TO ALL.

There is one other point that I now wish to press upon you. Thus far I have attempted by a plain expression of my views, to gain the confidence of those who are really friends of the Sabbath, and now I wish to turn to these persons, and say, "It is not enough to *keep* Sunday. Sunday is to be *administered* as well as kept. You are bound to see to it, not merely that you do not break the Lord's Day, but that it does its appropriate work through the whole community. This is your duty. For instance, you may be prosper-



ous; you may be able to say, "I go to church; thank God I do not ride in the cars either; I go in my own carriage; I attend to what the minister says; I pay liberally for the support of the Gospel; what lack I yet?" And you return to your dinner, cooked on Saturday, perhaps, but bountiful, and warmed with generous liquors; and made palatable in other ways. You may be a prosperous man, and your house entertain all that heart could wish, and on Sunday, after dinner, you lie on the sofa, slippers and with dressing-gown, and with every comfort; and at night you gather your household together, and have, oh! such a happy time; and you say to yourself, "How ridiculous it is for men to undertake to destroy this beautiful day!" I have a word to say to you. You have all that you could desire. You have your pew in church. You have the respect of your minister. You walk in a circle that does obedience to you. You have a magnificent home, and all manner of luxuries. But how is it with the poor cooper? How is it with the poor blacksmith? How is it with the poor laborer, who climbs four pairs of stairs to his solitary room in some attic where he lives without comforts, without a household, without a branch which bears a blossom? The Jewish Sabbath became a day for prosperous men, and was administered so that the poor man was oppressed, and Christ said substantially this: "Any keeping of the Sabbath which neglects humanity to the poorest and the lowest is a violation of the day—a breaking of it."

#### STREET CARS OUGHT TO RUN.

You must not take your measure from your own prosperity. It is very easy for you to say, piously, "City cars ought not to run on Sunday; people ought to stay where they are." For my own part, I believe that city cars ought to run on Sunday; and if you want me to compromise the matter, I will say that on Sunday rich men shall not ride in them, and poor people shall be allowed to ride in them at half price! You ought to make locomotion easy to those who need it most. Those who are obliged to work all the week, cannot on week days visit their family connections, their parents, their brothers and sisters, their cousins, or their uncles and aunts, as the case may be, who are scattered here and there, some in Brooklyn, for instance, while they are in the upper part of New York. You can make visits in your carriages, on any day you please, but the poor man needs to have a car on Sunday. And I believe in keeping up the affinities of friendship. I believe in their being ministered to, even on the Sabbath day. Therefore I believe in running the cars. Not that there are not many evils connected with it, but that on the whole it serves the cause of the poor in the community.

I would, however, have it done less at the expense of the drivers and conductors than it now is. There is a great deal of sinning against the poor in that direction, of which I shall speak in a moment.

#### THE DUTY OF THE COMFORTABLE.

There are a great many persons who feel that they have done their work for the Sabbath as soon as they have gone to church. Then their conscience is satisfied. "Ah!" says a man as he begins to divest himself of his raiment for his couch, "I have kept the law. I have been to church twice. I have heard the minister. I have seen that my children were all rightly dressed and properly catechised. I have done my whole duty." Have you? Do you know what is the condition of the people in your ward? Do you know how men live in the families next to you? Do you know how the poor men over the way in the street behind you are living? Do you know anything about your fellow men? Has the Lord's Day made you acquainted with anything beyond yourself? Have you extended your sympathy to those who are around about you? Do you feel more tolerant toward imperfect men in the community? Are you a larger and more generous man? Is your blood warmer; or are you a cold man still? Are you selfish in your religion? If so, you have not kept Sunday as you should have kept it, and your church observances have not done you good.

#### CIRCUMSTANCES ALTER CASES.

All men must keep the Sabbath according to the way in which they are circumstanced. In the village, where the church is capacious enough to hold all the population, where men live at home, and where there are no strangers, I see no special reason why there should be anything more than the church and the household. You can make no institutions that are better than the family; and the instruction of the church and the social advantages of the household are adequate for sparse populations of village life. But that which may be enough for a village of five hundred or a thousand inhabitants, is not enough for a city of a million. For instance, in the city of New York, there are two hundred and fifty thousand people who could not get into the churches of the city. If you should fill them full to the dome, there would then be two hundred and fifty thousand men and women who were excluded. You have not churches enough. There is this vast number whom you have not made provision for—and that, leaving out the sick and others who could not attend church on the Lord's Day. In village life there is provision; but not in city life.

## SPECIAL CLASSES.

For example, look at the artisans in New York—the workers in all manner of materials. Have you taken the trouble to go among them? Many have. There are missionary spirits who have gone into every part of the city. But many of you never have. You have never gone into cellars and attics. You have never seen where the shoemaker and the blacksmith work. You have never been in the nooks and corners where many of the trades are carried on.

When Sunday comes round, I say, “Blessed be God for my house!” But as I look round on every side, I say, “Probably there are more than ten thousand families over there in that great city who have no room to spread themselves.” They are high up, or they are low down; and whole families are grouped in one or two small rooms. What sort of a home have they for Sunday? There are men who have not smelled fresh air for six days. There are men on whose head, for six days, the light has hardly shone. There are men etiolated and without expansion, without aerated blood, secluded and hidden; and if, when Sunday comes, they say to their wife and their children, “What if we go down to Greenwood, to-day, and hear the birds sing? Let us go and see how sweet things look down there,”—would you meet them with a scowl as they went out of the house, and say to them, “My friends, this is the Lord’s Day, and you ought not to be taking the cars and riding down there”? My answer would be, “Yes, this is the Lord’s Day, and the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof—the country as well as the city.” If men are, in the providence of God, so shut up in the city that they cannot breathe the pure, sweet, fresh air, though I would say to them, “You ought not to neglect the church, it is necessary for you; you, more than anybody, ought to have the benefit of the church on Sunday;” yet would I also say, “During a part of this day you have a right to God’s free air; and during a part of it you have a right to the sun in the country. The cars are yours; the sun is yours; the birds are yours; the sky is yours; the earth is yours. Take them, in the name of God, and be thankful for them.”

There is another class in our cities who need some help for the Sabbath day. I refer to the vast number of persons who are, by the nature of their work, forbidden to have a Sunday. I do not know how many upper and under-servants there are in our great hotels. I know that there is an army of such persons, to whom no day of rest comes, and I confess that I do not know how to give advice in regard to them; but I do say that some means ought to be provided to enable this class of laborers to take cheap rides, during part of

the Sabbath day, out of the places in which they are confined in the city.

But, on the other hand, what shall we do for the car-driver and the conductor? These men are, I think, as much overworked as any class in our cities—that is, they are worked more hours; and, as far as lawful pay is concerned, at less wages than any other class in the community. While on the Lord's Day they are conveying their fellows to church, to the houses of relatives, or to the fellowship of God in Nature, they themselves have no rest. Some arrangement ought to be made by which drivers and conductors should have relief on Sunday—some more equitable mode of alternation in duty.

Take the very institutions which we are considering to-night—the art galleries, the lyceums, the reading-rooms, and the libraries. It is sometimes said, "If you open them on Sunday, you take away the Sabbath from their custodians—from the janitor, the librarian, the clerk, the keeper." Some provision ought to be made that, while you are making Sunday better for the young men of the city, you shall not make it worse for these administrators. There ought to be some arrangement by which every man connected with any enterprise should have the benefit of Sunday, in some way.

The ferries ought not to be run on Sunday, unless the ferry companies give a part of the day to their employés. Hotel keepers ought to see that their employees have a part of Sunday to themselves. Christian gentlemen, Christian ladies, this is what I call *administering* Sunday. You ought, in some way, to carry the bounty of Sunday to everybody. You ought to see that there are means provided for moral instruction to every class in this great community.

#### THE PERILS OF YOUNG MEN.

Look at the young men who come to New York. I do not know how many of them there are without homes or friends. I suppose that when I count them by tens of thousands I am moderate. What is the life of these young men? He is fortunate who has come from a country Christian household and home, and has had his lot cast in a good boarding-house. There *are* some good boarding-houses. I stand up for that much-maligned class, boarding-house keepers. There *are* some who I know are mothers in Israel and fathers in Israel to those that are in their households, watching for them, and doing for them. But, on the other hand, there are a great many boarding-houses that are not the way to heaven—unless it be through vigils and fasts!

Here are thousands of young men who come down to New York



from warm-hearted family circles. They are strangers among strangers. They are worked hard through the day. They either sleep at the store where they work, or roost in a boarding-house. For them there are no provisions made which answer at all to their home-life. When the Sabbath day comes, one of these young men lifts himself up from his cot under the counter, or on the counter, or in his desolate little bedroom, and dresses himself and goes to breakfast. After breakfast, the question comes up as to what he shall do. "Tom, what are you going to do?" "I don't know; what are you going to do?" "Well, about the same thing." It being Sunday, and just after breakfast, it is half-past nine. They have slept, and slept, and slept; and they have eaten their late breakfast; and they say, "Let us go out in the street and see what we can find." Perhaps they make up their minds to go to church somewhere. They saunter along. There is no special church that they know anything about, or are interested in. They go into the first one that they see open. They count, one, two, three, four, five, six,—well, there are forty or fifty people there, it may be. "Well," they say, "don't let us stop here; let us go up to the next church." They go up to the next church, and as they enter, two or three people give them a polite stare, as much as to say, "What under the heavens have you come here for?" Nobody rises to receive them. No courtesy nor kindness is shown them. For you know that men and women who would be ashamed not to be polite to any one in their own house, think it right to treat every stranger in the Lord's house as though he were a penitentiary convict. Not daunted by this cold reception, they venture forward, and think they will take that seat; but the usher says, "No, not there," and takes them back, and finally seats them in the last pew in the corner. They sit down, and look at each other a moment, and then get up and bolt. From Sunday to Sunday, in this way they go to different places. They make a kind of pilgrimage from church to church; and they are fortunate if they find one where they are courteously received, where they are made to feel welcome, where it seems like home, where some one says to them, "Where do you live? Shall I not come and see you this week? Will you not come and see me?" I fear that there are hundreds and thousands of young men who on Sunday mornings go to churches and find nothing that does them good. What do they generally find? Suppose they get a lodgment, what is the nature of the teaching which is administered to them? They are told, perhaps, that the ministry has been handed down from the time of the apostles—and it interests them exceedingly! They are glad that it is so! There is no special nourishment in it; but still it is

proved. They get just about that spiritual nourishment which they would if they sat and saw crochet-work going on. No stitches are let down. Every thread is in the right place. Or, in another church, they are told that,

“In Adam’s fall we sinned all.”

—a very comforting doctrine !

Others go to still another church, and they find out something about Belshazzar, or something about the visions of Daniel, or something about the disclosures in the Apocalypse. How seldom do young men get into a church where the preacher is speaking of things that go right home to *them*—their temptations; their difficulties; their wants ! How seldom do they get into a church where they feel that there are hearts which throb and glow with the spirit of brotherhood ! How seldom do they get into a church where there is something that their souls can feed on !

There is many a young man on the verge of destruction, who began right, whose inspiration was right, whose ideal was right, but who is weak on the social side, who is tempted in this way and that, and who has come to a point where all the barriers which restrain him from evil are in danger of being broken down. He was educated to honesty; he means to be honest; but his wants are increasing every week, and are not increasing in the right directions. He stands unsettled, vibrating between right and wrong. There is enough conscientiousness left in him to chastise him with a whip of scorpions. And if now he could go into a house of God where some man spoke to his need, he might be lifted out of the snare and saved from the pit. There are many places, hundreds, thousands of places in the city of New York where he might receive help and succor; but he does not know how to get to them. He wanders through some of the principal thoroughfares or conspicuous streets; and if he finds anything to help him it is the exception. He is apt to find nothing but coldness and indifference. And he strolls back again, and thanks God that at last it is two o’clock—dinner time. That helps Sunday amazingly. He eats his dinner. Then he goes out to smoke. When it is three or four o’clock he does not know what to do. He walks around the streets. By and by it is supper time. He eats supper. So at last he has worn out all the day—and the day has pretty nearly worn him out.

At night he says, “Look here, this is a doleful business; I wish I could go somewhere where somebody cares for me.” Alas! there are places where somebody cares too well for him. Over the entrance is written “*The way to joy* ;” and over the exit is written, “*The way to damnation*.” He goes in and is caught as a bird in the snare



of the fowler. Hecatombs of young men are destroyed in this city without mourners. Hundreds and thousands of young men in every single year go down the way of death, and nobody cares for their souls. Fellow citizens, I say that the young men of New York—the mechanics, the clerks, the laboring men—ought to have something on the Lord's Day that shall be a home or a resort for them. Our Christianity has done much. The family has done much. And there are self-denying laborers in households and in churches. These institutions are doing a great many things. But there are things that ought to be done which are not yet done. There ought to be, conspicuously, such places open on evenings and on Sundays as shall leave a young man without excuse if he wanders into by and forbidden paths for the sake of company.

#### THE PROPOSED REMEDY.

Under such circumstances, if it is proposed to open, on the Lord's Day, well-lighted reading-rooms, comely library halls, and galleries where no licentious art solicits, but where there is an appeal to the sense of beauty; if it is proposed to open places, where there is liberty, where comforts are provided, and where young men can meet their fellows and not be thrown out into the street, I say, in the spirit of that Master whose resurrection or birth we celebrate on that Sabbath-day, try it—*try it!*

I beseech of those conscientious men who are opposed to this movement not to misrepresent the intentions of those who are in favor of opening these reading-rooms and libraries; not to say, "They do not care anything for Sunday, and they are going to break down the bars and destroy the Sabbath." We are stepping in to endeavor to supplement the noble work of the churches, and do something that the churches were not made to do, and do not perform, and cannot perform. There are thousands and hundreds of thousands in New York who, on Sunday, owing to their peculiar relations and situations, need something done for them more than is done. If they could have homes, and if they could attend churches, that would be better; but they have no homes, and they cannot, under the circumstances, always attend churches.

Well, will they go to the reading-rooms? Multitudes will not; but it would be worth while to open the reading-rooms if there should be fifty to attend them. And if nobody should go there certainly will be no harm done.

#### OBJECTIONS TO THE PLAN.

It is objected, frequently, "You have no right to use the Lord's *day* for anything but religion." I say we have a right to use the

Lord's Day for every purpose of humanity. I say that the Lord's Day is consecrated to every thing that does good to the manhood of men, whether it be strictly religious, whether it be moral, or whether it be social. But it is objected, "If you begin, you cannot stop. When you have once let down the bars, you cannot tell what the results will be." Fellow-citizens, we are not children. We are competent to self-government. We do not run at the sound of a rattle, and turn back at the sound of another. We are trying to make an experiment in good and virtuous earnest. We mean good, we mean virtue, we mean manhood; and if when the experiment has been fairly tried, if after a sufficient number of years, we find that it does no good, or that it does harm, I pledge myself in behalf of the gentlemen who are now immediately concerned in this matter, that they will shut the door as promptly as now they propose to open it. But it is said, "If you begin it, you cannot stop it." We *can* stop it. Any intelligent and moral community can go to the right or to the left according as they find by experience that going to the right or to the left is mischievous or beneficial.

But it is said, "Look at the countries where there is no Sunday." Yes, look at the countries where people are not educated. Look at the countries where the people are priest-ridden. Look at the countries where there is no popular liberty. There you find that the tyrant, where he be hierarch or potentate, pays off the people for their political liberty by giving them holidays to play on. They please them with amusement on Sunday, and other bribes, to make them willing to part with their privileges. But that is not the case in this country. It is not so in America. And I scorn, in behalf of our whole American citizenship, the allegation or the insinuation that we shall come to bull-fighting and cock-fighting and rat-baiting as soon as we open libraries and reading-rooms for men in order that they may instruct themselves. Do you suppose that we shall turn New York into Havana by giving a larger liberty of intelligence to young men? The Lord may have made you very well as far as he went, but he stopped a great while too soon for your good, if that is your style of reasoning.

But it is said, "It will lead young men to stay away from the churches, and substitute mere reading and intelligence for religion." My reply to that is, that it will draw ten young men from the street where it draws one from the church; and it will be more likely to send ten men to the church, where one goes to it now without such an auxiliary. I believe it will be the means of increasing the moral susceptibilities of the young, and not of deadening them.

But you say, "You will compel the librarian and the keepers to

stay there." I believe that the Young Men's Christian Associations would be happy to furnish volunteers who should take their turn in caring for the libraries and reading-rooms. Is there any better work that these associations could do than lending their aid to an undertaking like this? And so far as the members of the Mercantile Library Association are concerned, I take it that there is principle enough among them to see to it that every man who is employed in these places has some part of Sunday to himself. I do not wish to make the duties of custodians any heavier than they are already; but I wish to extend the privileges of such benevolent institutions to those who have them not, and at the same time institute some mode of relief on Sunday for those who sit there during the other six days of the week.

But, it is said, "It is undertaking that which is in the dark. It is doing a very risky and perilous thing. You have never tried it. You do not know what the end will be." I beg your pardon. The thing has been tried. I have in my hand a letter from Philadelphia, which I will read:

2107 DE LANCEY PLACE, PHILADELPHIA.

*Dear Sir:* You are announced, I see, to speak, on Monday night, on the Library question. I desire to tell you that our Mercantile Library in Philadelphia has been open to the public on Sunday for nearly two years—it will be two years in June. The first year it was closed early in the evening, but now it remains open until ten o'clock at night. The attendance has risen steadily, from three hundred per day the first year, until now the average is seven hundred, nearly all of whom are young men. No books are given out on shares on that day, so that the army of employés have rest; but as the library is on the open-case plan, the readers may roam at will.

Both the President, Mr. Morris Perot, and the Librarian in charge, Mr. D'Ossone, have expressed themselves to me as entirely satisfied with the working of the new arrangement, now too well established to be called an experiment. There is no disorder, and more than even the usual hush. In fact, it is only the opening of one cathedral more, where those who hunger and thirst during the busy week may come and be filled.

Very truly, yours,

S. C. HALLOWELL.

Now, one word more. I wish to express my strong conviction that the Sabbath day is a boon and bounty of God to the common people, and to the working classes. Though I have advocated a certain amount of social liberty, I wish you to remember that I qualified it, as I still qualify it, by expressing the opinion that all civic enjoyment or social feeling shall include in it a definite basis of moral instruction on the Sabbath day. I wish to add that while there will not be much gained in the upper ranks of society by the strict maintenance of Sunday, which has done its work mostly for

the prosperous classes, I expect to see that the more liberal administration of the Lord's Day, religiously, socially, and intellectually, will rain down blessings upon the poorer classes. And for their sake—for the sake of the friendless, for the sake of the homeless, for the sake of the young men and young women—I plead for the opening of places where they may go for company and for information on the Lord's Day. If it be thought best not to open them during the whole of Sunday, that is a matter to be determined on principles of expediency. It seems to me that they should be open from noon until at least ten o'clock in the evening. The morning can be occupied profitably in other ways. The afternoon is when the time hangs heavy with indolence; and the evening is the time when is most felt the call for social exhilaration. And if light and attractive reading-rooms and libraries are open, and if friendly voices are heard, and kind greetings are exchanged, I believe that experience will show within a very few years, that New York never did a better thing than to provide these places and homes of Sabbath resort for the young men of the city.

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## RESOLUTIONS.

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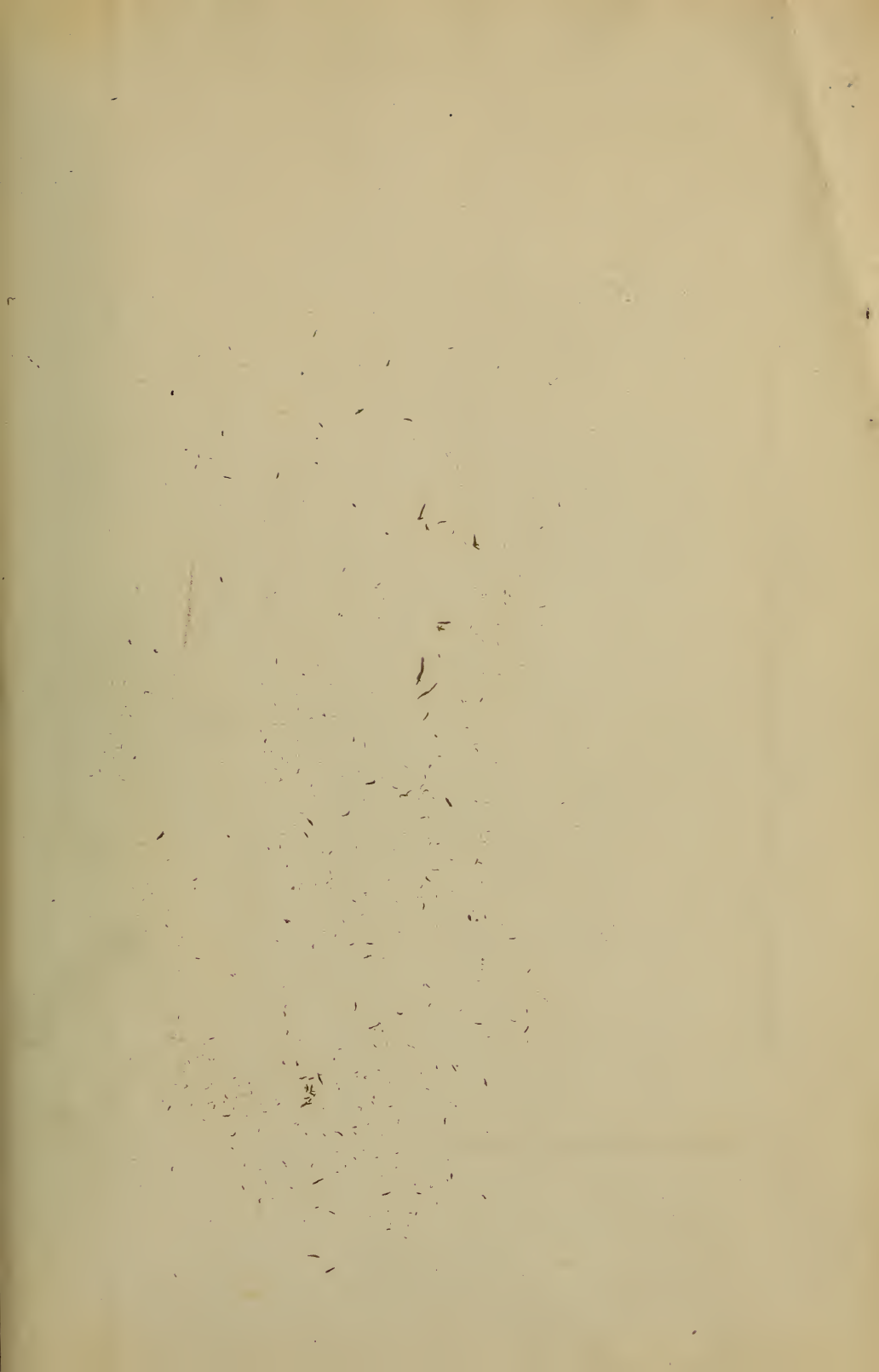
At the close of Mr. Beecher's remarks, Mr. Henry D. Lloyd offered the following resolutions, which were carried unanimously:

"In the belief that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, and that it is right to do good on that day,

"*Resolved*, That in order to add to the Christian's uses of the Lord's Day, in order that it may be not broken as now, but the better kept, in order that there may be not less, but more of Sunday, that our social, moral, and intellectual manhood may be suffered to develop on every day of the week, we earnestly call upon the managers of the Mercantile, the Cooper Union, the Astor, and all the great libraries, not only of this, but of all the great cities of this land, to throw open their reading-rooms upon the Sabbath day, under regulations which they may deem suitable; and,

"*Resolved*, That we hereby offer the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher our heartfelt thanks for the noble eloquence with which he has once more established the harmony between Christianity and humanity, and has pleaded in behalf of homeless young men for humanizing resorts on Sunday, ~~making the Sabbath a day of rest~~."











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